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OSD/ISA/APSA FOR SHINN/HILL/BASALLA; COMUSJAPAN FOR J00,
J01, J5

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/22/2017

TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: MOD DENIES REQUEST FOR BRIEF ON U.S. NUCLEAR POLICY

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer; Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) The Yomiuri Shimbun quoted "senior Ministry of Defense" officials in its March 20 evening edition about a plan to request a briefing from the USG on how the U.S. nuclear umbrella would be utilized in an attack on Japan. The article claimed that the briefing was part of ongoing efforts to update bilateral operational plans. The March 20 assertions came the same day as a larger editorial piece in the Yomiuri raising questions over the reliability of the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

¶2. (C) Ministry of Defense (MOD) Defense Policy Bureau Defense Policy Coordinator Masami Oka insisted that the Yomiuri report was entirely groundless and claimed that he that was unaware of any such discussion taking place within the Ministry. On March 20, Oka told embassy Tokyo that MOD's Operational Planning Division was preparing media guidance to refute the story, although he subsequently clarified on March 22 that MOD decided to use its standard formula on leaks regarding bilateral planning with no specific reference to the nuclear issue. MOFA Security Treaty Division Director Junji Shimada separately said that he would be surprised if the nuclear policy angle of the story were true, but said it is disturbing that MOD officials appear to be discussing sensitive bilateral planning issues with reporters.

¶3. (C) The Yomiuri reporter who filed the story told the embassy that he decided to file the story after conducting a series of interviews with senior uniformed Self-Defense Force (SDF) officers and civilian MOD officials for Yomiuri's analytical series on the U.S. nuclear umbrella. The reporter admitted that no one actually said that they planned to ask the U.S. directly to brief Japan on U.S. nuclear launch policy, but said that it was "his impression" from these interviews that senior MOD/SDF officials are extremely uncertain about the reliability of the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Based on these comments, he speculated on his own that MOD "would probably" ask the U.S. side at an upcoming DAS-level Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) meeting for a clear explanation on operational guidelines for U.S. nuclear forces.

¶4. (C) Comment: Details in the Yomiuri report appear to have been embellished to buttress the paper's editorial series on the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Nevertheless, Japanese officials and military officers interviewed probably did freely voice concerns over how iron-clad the U.S. nuclear guarantee is.

Such sentiment is not uncommon in Japan, and in many ways is unavoidable given the inherent ambiguity in nuclear release decisions. It is unfortunate, however, that MOD and SDF officials feel comfortable discussing this subject, and broader bilateral planning matters, with reporters.

SCHIEFFER